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SUBJECT: MODERATE ISLAMISTS ASK FOR USG POSITION ON PM

Classified By: Ambassador Zalmay Khalilzad for reasons 1.4 (B) and (D).

[11](#). (C) SUMMARY: At a March 7 meeting with the Ambassador, a group of moderate Islamists agreed on the need for a strong unity government but pushed for the Ambassador to endorse a prime ministerial candidate. The group also expressed its concern for Iraq's political future and identified the need for an overhaul of the education system and for access to the media in order to establish the "right to be moderate and secular." END SUMMARY.

[12](#). (C) At a March 7 meeting, former Transitional National Assembly member and ex-Dawa politician Dhiya Shakerchi expressed his concern to the Ambassador about the ever-increasing rise in sectarian tensions, claiming that extremists are exploiting the democratic process. Iraq is in crisis, commented Shakerchi, because the leadership is not reacting appropriately and there is no sense of direction within the ministries. Sabah newspaper editor Muhammed Abd al-Jabar al-Shabut stated that everyone needs to come together and form the new government. The Ambassador suggested that the group use its established media presence to influence the public about the need for a unity government. Islamic democrat and scholar Thamir al-Amiri responded that PM Jafari has threatened to close Sabah newspaper, alleging that its articles had inflamed the sectarian crisis. Al-Amiri charged that Jafari's behavior is no different from Saddam's.

[13](#). (C) Al-Shabut said that the USG is a major player in Iraq and that people want to know its preference for PM. He claimed that the Ambassador continues to be unclear about his position on PM Jafari, confusing the public and the Shia Coalition. When the Ambassador asked the group for its views on potential PM candidates, they named National Security Advisor Mowafuq Rubaie, Deputy President Adil Abd al-Madhi, and Fadhila Party leader Nadim al-Jabiri.

[14](#). (C) Democratic Islamic Trend General Secretary Hosain al-Adili identified education as the primary building bloc of democracy, adding that education in Iraq has been neglected and mismanaged for many years. He lamented that the USG has spent too much time building a government and has no energy to devote to educational reform. Al-Shabut stated that strengthening the moderate Islamic coalition will require enormous funding and access to media.

KHALILZAD